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SUBJECT: ELECTIONS, GRASSROOTS EFFORTS KEY TO DARFUR PEACE, SAYS GOS
LEAD NEGOTIATOR

REF: Khartoum 829

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The biggest obstacle to a political solution of the Darfur conflict is not the rebels' lack of political will, but rather their lack of capacity, the GOS lead negotiator to the Doha talks told CDA and S/USSES Peace and Security Team in a meeting on November 16. Dr. Amin Hassan Omer, State Minister for Culture, Youth and Sports, also cautioned that while the Doha peace process could address security arrangements, the best mechanism to address the question of power sharing was the holding of elections, which would neutralize the movements' personal and tribal aspirations to political power. Other contentious issues such as land rights and tribal reconciliation would ultimately have to be solved not in Doha but rather at the grassroots level in Darfur, he said. Omer also expressed concern about the marginalization of Darfur's Arab tribes in the peace process. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Omer believes that the rebels' lack of capacity is a greater obstacle to a peace agreement than a lack of political will. The real problem is finding credible representatives from the movements, he said, adding that unlike the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in Naivasha, Darfur's rebels were largely naive and unsophisticated. Civil society can help fill these gaps, he said, by addressing issues like justice and reconciliation which the movements are ill-suited to tackle. While the movements can negotiate security arrangements and power sharing, issues such as land rights and compensation will ultimately have to be solved at the grassroots level. "Not everything can be resolved in Doha," he said.

¶3. (SBU) While an eventual peace agreement will clear an important hurdle to a sustainable peace in Darfur, improving the security and humanitarian situation is not incumbent on negotiations, said Omer. The reactivation of some security provisions of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), such as IDP involvement in community policing, can go a long way towards improving security on the ground, he said. He also lauded the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID)'s community policing efforts and training of local police as positive steps in increasing security.

¶4. (SBU) With regard to the next steps in the peace process, Omer noted that Joint Chief Mediator Djibril Bassole had told him he expected to convene a roundtable in Doha following the Eid holiday (Note: The Eid al Adha holiday occurs November 28-30. End Note), with representatives from the Addis Group and possibly the Tripoli Group as well. JEM may also feel pressure to attend given the nascent rapprochement between Chad and Sudan, but the real problem is Abdul Wahid. Omer does not expect Abdul Wahid to return to the negotiating table, an obstacle he believes can be overcome if the Addis Group achieves enough popular legitimacy. (Note: The Tripoli Group, largely a collection of individuals, has no such legitimacy. End Note.)

¶5. (SBU) Omer noted that following Eid, discussions between the GOS and the Addis Group and/or Tripoli group on a cessation of hostilities and framework agreement will likely be cut short by the Christmas holiday, although a cessation of hostilities with those parties should not take long to negotiate, he said, given that it already exists in de facto form. A framework agreement addressing issues such as power sharing would take longer, he said, but noted that the ultimate solution to the power sharing dilemma was to focus on elections as a way to neutralize personal and tribal aspirations to political power on the part of the movements.

¶6. (SBU) Omer also expressed concern about the marginalization of Darfur's Arab tribes in the current peace process, noting that most were not a part to the conflict. "They feel that if peace ever comes, it will be at their expense," he said. He noted that while banditry is rampant along the vast territory of Darfur, some of it is "politically instigated" by frustrated Arab tribesman. The tribal leadership has the ability to curb such activity, but a vigorous outreach is needed, he said. He further noted that talk of development in Darfur needs to go beyond the needs of settled peoples to include nomads as well.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: Omer is correct about the de facto ceasefire between the GOS and indigenous Darfuri rebel groups, save for the occasional GOS offensive to "rout out bandits", which more often than not results in GOS encroachment on Darfur's "liberated zones". With UNAMID approaching full deployment and looking to strengthen its implementation of rules of engagement, there is hope for an improved security situation in 2010; however, Darfur's restive Arab tribesmen responsible for much of the banditry and kidnappings must be reined in, a responsibility that ultimately lies with the government.

KHARTOUM 00001300 002 OF 002

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